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ABSTRACT

This bulletin describes a procedure to provide graduate students with meaningful lab experiences, and to integrate the study of a variety of group counseling approaches with actual group leadership opportunities. It allows the beginning group counselor to develop confidence before working with emotionally disturbed clients, and also provides motivated non-clients for a semester's duration. The bulletin offers a description of the student population, includes a brief overview of procedures, and discusses specific procedures at some length. Also included is a discussion of problems encountered, as well as the goals and advantages of the program. (PFS)

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# PREPARING GROUP COUNSELING LEADERS WHILE USING STUDENTS AS SUBSTITUTE CLIENTS

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# PREPARING GROUP COUNSELING LEADERS WHILE USING STUDENTS AS SUBSTITUTE CLIENTS

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In order to provide graduate students with meaningful lab experiences and to integrate the study of a variety of group counseling approaches with actual group leadership opportunities the following procedure has been devised and used with occasional modifications for the past six years. It provides the beginning group counselor with an opportunity to perfect techniques and to develop self confidence before attempting counseling with emotionally disturbed clients. The procedure also provides motivated, non-clients for a semester's duration, allowing the groups to begin at the start of the semester and eliminating the problem of dropouts.

Labs for two classes are combined: senior-graduate level students enrolled in a course "Individual Counseling and Interviewing" and a graduate level course "Seminar in Group Counseling." The students who are the group members have an opportunity to become aware from the client's frame of reference how different techniques affect the client; often this is the first group experience the student has had.

## DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT POPULATION

The student leaders from the Seminar in Group Counseling are classified graduate students matriculated in either the Clinical/Community M.A. program or the Psychological Services M.A. program leading to a Credential as School Psychologist. A prerequisite of the class is completion of the undergraduate Counseling and Interviewing class or equivalent. They have already studied a variety of theories and techniques used in individual counseling and psychotherapy. Many have co-led groups, participated in groups and have had additional study in specific therapeutic approaches.

The students in the Counseling and Interviewing class are either seniors or unclassified graduate students most of whom plan to enter M.A. or Ph.D. level programs in Clinical, Counseling, Community or School Psychology.

## OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURES

The group leaders alternate two weeks of leading their group utilizing a particular approach to counseling with an equal time spent observing their classmates leading groups. Each counselor has a co-leader and is observed through a one-way mirror by the professor or graduate assistant and by several class members. Following the group session the observers meet with the leaders to discuss the theoretical formulation used and specific plan for this session, the individual and group dynamics observed, techniques used, misused, or unused. An evaluation is made and suggestions offered for the next session. About every third session is videotaped and then viewed and discussed by the leaders and observers. The theoretical persuasions studied in class and practiced in the lab are Rogerian, Reality Therapy, Gestalt, Sensitivity-Encounter, and Behavior Therapy. Where students have particular interests, knowledge and experience, a two week involvement with other forms of counseling and therapy have been incorporated. These

have included: poetry, art, music, dance, and mask therapy. This use of the lab time offers each graduate student an opportunity to lead groups using several different approaches thus discovering which philosophies and techniques are used well or poorly, which fit with the student's personality, and also how to work with a co-leader.

SPECIFIC PROCEDURES

Although once established the program follows a rigid schedule and it is flexible enough to accomodate varying numbers of students enrolled in the two classes. The most usual sizes are twenty students in the undergraduate class and twelve in the graduate class but it has been successful with the same number of students in the two classes. There should be six to eight group members for an optimum sized group but it has been necessary to vary the format to work with four or five group members and even to use three co-leaders. Since only three to four groups can be established the number of the graduate students working as leaders at any one time period is no more than eight. Those not leading serve as observers.

Two methods have been used to give each co-leader an experience with several therapy formats. In one the leaders are assigned to a group for a six week period. During this time they study and discuss three different techniques of group counseling and psychotherapy. They use each for two weeks. At the end of the six weeks two different graduate students become the group leaders and they study, discuss and use three additional theories and techniques for the following six weeks with the previous leaders becoming the observers. In the second method the group leaders pair up and select the three techniques they wish to use. They then alternate between leading a group and being observers. Thus they work with different co-leaders every time and with different group members.

The usual class format begins with the study and discussion of the philosophy and techniques of Rogerian Theory and the first two lab periods are run using Rogerian principles. The class then begins the study of Reality Theory in preparation for using this method during the second two week lab period. The same procedure is used for the other approaches to group counseling. When possible a film and/or a tape recording illustrating the therapy under study is provided for the class. Often the class as a whole simulates a group with one of the members taking the role of the leader to practice and demonstrate techniques and provide material for discussion.

Each pair of co-leaders meets to discuss the philosophy of the theory under study and how to apply the particular techniques to their group. When appropriate they evolve a plan of action. After the group session and discussion with the observers the co-leaders write a report summarizing the discussion and prepare a plan for the next session incorporating the suggestions made. They learn to be aware of their interactions with one another as well as with the group members. This information is available to the leaders who next meet the group so that either through observation or through reading the reports they become aware of the individual dynamics and on-going group dynamics. Often the leaders also make audiotapes which they listen to between sessions. The tapes are available to any group member who has missed the previous session.

While the groups are in progress the observers take notes on the dynamics and the techniques and use these as a basis for the discussions that follow the group session. The professor is able to evaluate the observers' grasp of the material from the comments made and from the notes. Students who do not have the opportunity to lead a particular type of group can vicariously experience it and learn much from the observation and discussion. Occasionally one of the observers calls a leader out of the session to give immediate feedback and to suggest changes in techniques. This is done sparingly but students report it allows them to make corrective changes while the opportunity exists and in many ways is preferable to feedback after the fact.

The group leaders can be evaluated on their knowledge as shown by the plan submitted, their ability to use a variety of counseling techniques correctly, and their ability to be self critical. The weaknesses noted can be strengthened and improvement seen in the following session.

PROBLEMS WITH PROCEDURE

There seems to be no way for this procedure to work completely problem free. If a pair of co-leaders work with a group for six sessions the succeeding co-leaders may not be readily accepted; often the comparison is unfavorable, and the group members are reluctant to part with leaders with whom they have established rapport. This occurs even though they have been informed from the beginning that the change in leaders will take place.

If the co-leaders change every time a new technique is introduced they do not have the same familiarity with the individual and group dynamics to draw on which makes each group almost like a beginning group. However, when the co-leaders stay with the group but change their techniques more resistance to the new approach seems to develop than when approach and co-leader change together.

The undergraduate students are invited to choose an area about themselves they wish to understand or control better and use this as a focus for the group work throughout the semester. Obviously this is not quite the same as having clients highly motivated for counseling with serious concerns. The students, who are successfully completing their senior year or beginning graduate work do not see themselves as having "problems," and often find it difficult to begin revealing anything of a personal nature in the groups. Their resistance is understandable but frustrating to the group leaders who may have only two weeks to work with them. Some of the group members see themselves as being more skilled than the group leaders as a result of prior experiences and find it difficult to assume the group member role.

More and more students in a clinical option have had or are currently in counseling or therapy for personal problems and some of those who are not often find the group experience stimulates them to reveal personal problems of an intensity indicating a need for professional help. So, although the groups are begun as simulations of counseling groups they often become quite real. A few students are referred to the Counseling Center as they become aware of unresolved problems. Having this resource available makes it ethically possible for this

model of teaching group counseling to be used.

Another problem is the pace; a two semester course would be ideal but the procedure is quite workable within a twelve week period. The students must keep up with their reading and reports and attend class on a regular basis. The class, lab, and discussions are accomplished within a three hour twice weekly schedule. Review of tapes and summary write up takes some additional time.

GOALS AND ADVANTAGES OF THE PROCEDURE

The goals are to begin the training of group counselors within a well supervised, safe situation where they have professional back-up and are not stressed with facing actual clients before they have learned the principles of counseling. They are introduced to a variety of counseling approaches and can become somewhat knowledgeable about them, rather than concentrating on just one type of therapeutic approach. They learn that counseling is difficult, takes much effort and more training and supervision and they are less likely to view themselves as "therapists" after just one course. They also learn to work with a variety of co-leaders and a variety of group members--a richer experience than having one co-leader and one group for a whole semester. They develop their own techniques along with using those they are reading about and discover that techniques must be adapted to the individuals they are working with and cannot be learned cook-book style.

The group members learn about the various counseling approaches as they are affected by them and make comparisons between the individual counseling approaches they are studying and group counseling. They often learn some things about themselves they were not so aware of previously. To make clear the whole of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the undergraduate and the graduate students it should be stated here that as another part of their lab experience the undergraduate students hold individual counseling sessions with each other which they tape and transcribe. The graduate students each work with one or two of these undergraduates to help them understand and use a Rogerian style and philosophy of counseling. The graduates listen to the tapes, make comments on the transcripts and also meet with the student counselors to discuss their progress. Although the student receives feedback from the professor the graduate student has more time to spend, is perceived as a less threatening person who is not part of the evaluation process and also is someone who has recently taken the same course.

The greatest advantage for both groups of students is that by experiencing the therapeutic modality while reading about it they learn more and are more enthusiastic about the learning process.

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